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The National Women's Health Information Center

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Frequently Asked Questions about Tuberculosis (TB)



"I just found out that I'm pregnant. It's great news! I also found out that I have tuberculosis (TB). I had this cough that wouldn't go away. Sometimes, blood would come out when I'd cough. I've been really tired, but I thought it was just my busy job. My doctor gave me pills to take. I wanted to wait to take the pills until after I have the baby. But the doctor said the pills won't hurt my baby. She also said that if I don't take the pills, the baby could get sick. I've been taking them for a little while now. I think everything will be ok."

What is tuberculosis (too-burr-cue-low-sis) or TB?

TB is a disease caused by bacteria (bak-teer-ee-uh) or germs. It can hurt any part of your body. But it normally hurts your lungs.

How would I get TB?

TB is spread in the air. If someone with TB in their lungs or throat coughs or sneezes, people nearby who breathe in the germs may get TB.

TB is NOT spread in these ways:

- shaking someone's hand
- sitting on toilet seats
- sharing dishes and silverware with someone who has TB.

What are the types of TB?

There are 2 types of TB:

1) Latent TB infection: you have the TB germs, but it doesn't make you sick.

People with TB infection

- have no symptoms
- don't feel sick
- can't spread TB to others

If you have the TB germs, you could get sick. But you probably won't. Some health problems make your body weak, and you may not be able to fight the TB germs. If this happens, you'll get sick with TB disease.

2) TB disease: You have the TB germs and they are growing. If this happens in your lungs, you can have these symptoms:

- Bad cough that lasts more than 2 weeks
- Coughing up blood or phlegm (flem)
- Chest pain
- Feeling weak
- Losing weight
- Not wanting to eat
- Chills
- Fever
- Sweating at night

Who is more likely to get TB disease?

You are more likely to get TB disease if you:

- have HIV or AIDS
- got TB germs in the last 2 years
- inject drugs
- are sick with other diseases (like diabetes, leukemia, or kidney disease) that make it hard for your body to fight other health problems
- are elderly
- didn't get the right treatment for TB in the past

What are the tests for TB?

Skin test: With a needle, a small amount of liquid is put under your skin on the lower part of your arm. After 2 or 3 days, if you have a hard bump on your arm, your doctor will measure the bump and tell you if your test is positive or negative. If your test is positive, you most likely have TB germs.



If your skin test is positive, these tests will be done to see if you have TB disease:

- Test of your phlegm coughed up from your lungs
- Chest x-ray



TB can be found in other parts of your body besides your lungs. So you may have other tests too.

Is there medicine for TB?



If you have **TB infection** (the TB germs), your doctor may give you medicine (pills). The pills can keep you from getting TB disease in the future. Most people take them for 6 to 9 months. Even if you take them, there is a small chance you could get TB disease.

If you have **TB disease**, you will be given many different pills to take for 6 months or longer.

If I have TB disease, can I give it to other people?

If you have TB disease in your lungs or throat, you can give it to other people. You need to stay home from work or school. Visit your doctor. Your doctor will give you tests and then tell you when it's ok to go back. That may be 2 to 3 weeks after you start taking the pills.

What can I do to protect my family at home so I don't give TB to them?

- Take your pills. Keep taking them even after you start feeling better. Stop when your doctor tells you to.
- Always cover your mouth with a tissue when you cough, sneeze, or laugh. Put the tissue in a closed paper bag. Throw it away.
- Sleep in a bedroom by yourself.

I'm pregnant and found out I have TB. Is it safe to take medicine while I'm pregnant?



Yes, there are pills you can take for TB while you're pregnant. If you have **TB disease**, you will need to take pills for 9 months. But do NOT take Streptomycin. It is NOT safe.

If you have **TB infection** (TB germs), your doctor probably won't give you pills until after you have the baby. Some women may have to take pills before the baby is born. It depends on when you got TB and if you have other health problems, like HIV.

Can I breastfeed if I am taking pills for TB disease?

Yes, it is safe to breastfeed your baby if you are taking pills for TB disease. The small amount of medicine that gets into your breastmilk does not hurt your baby.

For more information...



You can find out more about TB by contacting the National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) (800) 994-WOMAN (9662) or the following organizations:

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Internet Address: www.niaid.nih.gov

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention

Division of Tuberculosis Elimination

Internet Address: www.cdc.gov/nchstp/tb

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

National Prevention Information Network (NPIN)

Phone Number(s): 800-458-5231

Internet Address: www.cdcpin.org/scripts/tb

American Lung Association

Phone Number(s): 212-315-8700

Internet Address: www.lungusa.org

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